

PRIME MINISTER SHRI CHARAN SINGH'S SPEECH AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON MEDICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AT A.I.I.M.S. NEW DELHI ON 27-8-1979

Shri Rabi Rai ji, esteemed colleagues from the states, distinguished members of the medical fraternity and friends.

I feel honoured that you have invited me today to inaugurate this important conference. As I was listening to Shri Rabi Rai he talked to me that whereas man has today acquired the ability to walk in outer space, here on earth he has not been able to take care of himself. The modern doctor has got entangled in the _____ which he has himself created. Medical education as we have inherited and developed it is a part of this system. It's acquiring sophistication day by day taking man to new heights; it is simultaneously making the ground slippery under this fact. The Indian situation in this regard is, perhaps, no different from the situation in some of the other developing countries. I am not against sophistication nor am I against expertise travelling from one place to another. The world is but one large family, but if this leads to neglect of the situation at home, if it does not lead to alleviation of misery for our people you have to pause and sit up and think whether the direction in which we are going is the direction in which we ought to be going. To my mind this direction has to be changed and changed drastically. The whole system has to undergo a radical change. My heart lives in villages because it is there that real India lives and I cannot contemplate with equanimity the spectacle of the widening depth between the village and the city, between man and man. A system that imparts medical education to boys and girls for cities alone and for foreign lands has to be modified. It has to take cognizance of the conditions existing in the country as a whole. It has to give greater importance to the positive aspects of health and to prevention of diseases as compared to cure or treatment of diseases. It has to participate actively in the spread of health education and it has to become a part of cultural ethos of the people from whose investment it has acquired a major part of its strength. To me health has got for components---- physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. It's my plea that it should be promoted as such. I do not understand why the health education has not been included in the educational system so far. Whatever be the causes responsible for the situation, we have to tackle them and remove them. For those who are denied the benefit of formal education through schools and colleges, health education through other media should be given considerably greater importance. It's unfortunate that in our country growth

of the human personality has been divorced from economic progress. Somehow in the process of planning man for whom planning is intended has not been given a place in the front row. We have made huge investments in steel plants and heavy factories which produce machines to make more machines.

We take pride in the fact that we have made rapid progress in industrialisation and from the point of view of technology we are ahead of many other countries. I share this pride. I am all for the advancement of science and technology but at the same time it is a matter of deep regret that programmes which can be construed as direct investment in man, programmes like education and health, should not have been given their due importance. I share Shri Rabi Rai's view that health should occupy a higher place in the national order of priorities. A little while ago I talked of villages. I must pay my compliments to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the new health scheme which they have introduced there. I am told that more than one lakh community health volunteers are already functioning under the scheme in as many villages and all of them are non-officials. This is a measure of far reaching importance. It is an excellent example of community participation in a major development programme. It has given concrete shape to the concept of planning from below. I am all praise for the Health Ministry for what it has been trying to achieve. But I must say at the same time that much more needs to be done in the rural area, not just in the sphere of health but in all other fields. When there is a power breakdown in Delhi or in Calcutta, there are screaming headlines in the newspapers. Similarly when there is a failure of water supply in the capital tempers are aroused. This is as it should be. It's normal for people to feel agitated when they are denied the facilities to which they are entitled or accustomed. But one night as well ask how are people in the village living without these facilities. Why don't we think of them? There are lakhs of villages where there is no electricity and no clean drinking water even. It's wrong for anyone to assume that people living in villages will continue to rest content with their present lot. Their interest demands and the national interest demands that elementary facilities which are available in cities must be extended to all villages. In the field of health the community health volunteers must be backed by an adequate network of primary health centres and sub-centres. And these centres and sub-centres must be manned by people whose education is in tune with the need of those whom they are paid to serve. If future planning ignores this vital aspect of our national life, it will be repugnant to all theories of democracy and welfare. All of you hold high positions in your disciplines. I am not competent to advise you on the kind of modifications which

should be brought about in the present system of medical education. But I reiterate my fervent plea that whatever decisions you take, must be related to our needs-- the needs of our masses. It means some scaling down of technology, if it means designing a new short-term course for medical personnel, we should not hesitate to take decisions to this effect.

Shri Rabi Rai has referred to the problem of population explosion, I agree with him that is one of the principal problems facing India today making a mockery of our efforts to make life better for ourselves and for our children. Of course, the problem is largely linked with the problem of poverty. Both of them have to be tackled simultaneously if we do not arrest the growth in our numbers we cannot bring about any appreciable reduction in imports. On the other hand poverty is apt to increase further if there is no checking on population growth. We have to bring this home to every family in the country. There has to be a massive programme to motivate the people to accept family planning as a way of life. Shri Rabi Rai's Ministry has launched such a programme and I wish them all success.

To this conference I would like to say that the doctors should command greater respect in the community than others including politicians, like myself and Rabi Rai, and should take the lead in making the family planning movement more effective. They come in contact with millions of patients and their relatives everyday. If while administering medicine to them they can also take to them about family planning and induce them to accept it they will be doing a great service to them as well as to the nation as a whole. The subject of family planning is already included in medical education. I do hope that _____ keeping in view all its current dimensions and its immediate relevance to national life. I am grateful to the Union Health Minister for giving me an opportunity to talk to you today. I am sure that sound and well considered recommendations for the re-orientation and re-structuring of medical and health education will emerge as a result of your deliberations which I wish all success.

(Clapping)

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